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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002404

SIPDIS

OFFICIAL INFORMAL

LAGOS FOR ROBYN HINSON-JONES

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/21/2006

TAGS: PREL ASEC PTER XA

SUBJECT: NIGERIA SECURITY AND STABILITY ASSESSMENT

REF: A. (A)SECSTATE 162454

1B. (B) ABUJA 2347

Classified by Charge Tim Andrews for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The likelihood of ethnic or religious unrest in Nigeria in the wake of an eventual U.S. response to the September 11 acts of terror is high. Such unrest would not necessarily be targeted at American individuals or institutions, but American lives and property could be at risk. Tensions here remain elevated following recent events in Jos (Ref. B) and Wukari. Demonstrations--either in favor of or opposing U.S. military actions--could spark renewed ethno-religious fighting, especially in the Middle Belt, but potentially almost anywhere. Major Muslim religious leaders here have unequivocally condemned the attacks on the U.S. However, many Muslims will be angered over any U.S. reprisal attack that affects fellow Muslims. Some can be expected to stage protests, as they did during the Gulf War and following our reprisals for the Embassy bombings in 1998. The GON is willing to protect U.S. diplomats and installations in Abuja and Lagos but is limited in its ability to do so. Outside of Abuja and the Lagos Islands, the GON's means of controlling civil unrest are less robust. Recently, the GON has managed to quell unrest only with the assistance of the military, and then after a substantial loss of life. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Nigeria, independent of events in the U.S., has just suffered another paroxysm of ethno-religious conflict in Jos (Ref. A). There is always a potential for violent unrest in Nigeria in those places where there exist longstanding ethnic or religious conflicts. In the past two years, Kaduna, Abia, Lagos, Nassarawa, Bauchi, Taraba and now Plateau States have witnessed civil unrest of varying degrees that has resulted in a substantial number of deaths and sometimes provoked reprisals elsewhere. Many Nigerians and expatriates believe that recent violence in Jos was exacerbated by the terror attacks in the U.S. Whether that assessment is accurate or not is almost immaterial; the fact that it is so widely believed creates a potential danger. Protests about U.S. reprisal attacks could spark a new round of fighting, there or elsewhere.

¶3. (C) The most likely venues for large-scale protests in the North would be Kano, Gusau, in Zamfara State and Kaduna and Zaria in Kaduna State. Protests could also materialize in other places, including Jos, Suleja or Abuja. We believe Gon security forces would be able to contain any demonstration within the parts of Abuja frequented by official Americans. The potential for civil unrest in response to a U.S. reprisal is highest in Kano because it is the largest predominantly Muslim city in the country, and is home to local and transnational Muslim radicals who may try to incite crowds to protest a USG military action. After the fuel-price demonstrations 15 months ago left several dead, the Kano State Government, in conjunction with the Emir of Kano, the National Police Force and the SSS, has worked successfully to prevent large-scale demonstrations and their associated violence. It is unclear, however, that they would be able to prevent, or to control, a spontaneous demonstration in the Old City of Kano in response to U.S. retaliation. The Old City could easily produce a spontaneous protest numbering in the tens of thousands. USAID has an office in Kano which has already been the subject of protests by Muslims after a Johns Hopkins family planning program met the disapproval of local Imams. While this office is a good distance from the Old City, it could again become the target of protests, as it is the only institution identified with the USG north of Abuja. The British Council maintains a large premises in the Old City of Kano, and that building could be a target of protests.

¶4. (C) Gusau is a likely spot for anti-American protests,

but at present there is only one American there, a priest. It is unlikely that the Zamfara state government would permit a protest that would target the Catholic church in Gusau, because Governor Sani does not want the public-relations problems that would ensue. However, political demonstrations in Gusau have sometimes turned violent there because of fierce political rivalries. Zaria, the capital of Islamic learning in Nigeria and home of the Nigerian Muslim Brotherhood, would likely see some protests centered on Ahmadu Bello University.

15. (C) While small protests in Sokoto are possible, there are few Americans who might be targeted. The Sultan of Sokoto has publicly condemned the terrorist attack on several occasions, and would likely work with Governor Bafarawa to prevent any large-scale protests there. While Kaduna could have small demonstrations, it is not likely to see large-scale protests, given its recent experience with devastating mob-violence. Seven local police stations have been built in the hotspots in and around Kaduna and are staffed with paramilitary Mobile Police, who would serve as a strong deterrent to any major protests. The recent violence in Jos, the devastating loss of life there and the continued presence of the military on the streets make it an unlikely venue for protests. Jos could re-ignite, however, if fighting starts elsewhere.

17. (C) The large, unplanned and often squalid urban communities outside Abuja could see demonstrations by Muslims. Since Abuja, like Jos and Kaduna, has a large population of Christians and Muslims, protests here by Muslims could potentially spark off violence simmering between the two groups over events in Jos and elsewhere. There are several USG identified institutions in Abuja, including the Embassy, USAID's offices and the American School. The USAID building, the Sheraton and the Hilton are all within walking distance of the National Mosque, and could see protests. The police maintain a strong presence in Abuja, and can be expected to protect U.S. diplomatic institutions. It is more likely that protests, and conflict, would originate in the densely-populated outlying residential districts, which have a collective population of over one million.

18. (C) While Nigerians or transnationals could try to attack U.S. installations or personnel in Nigeria, this has not happened yet. Short of a targeted attack, the greatest danger to Mission personnel in Abuja and Lagos, and Amcits generally, is crime and civil unrest. We met with Amcits in Kano and Abuja September 20 to discuss security issues, and are planning to meet with or contact remaining Amcits in the North and Middle Belt over the coming week.
Andrews